



U.S Department of Transportation
Office of Public Affairs
1200 New Jersey Ave., S.E.
Washington, DC 20590
www.dot.gov/affairs/briefing.htm

News

DOT 116-10

Tuesday, June 15, 2010

Contact: Patricia Klinger

Damon Hill

Tel: (202) 366-4831

DOT Reminds Excavators About the Dangers Involved in Digging Underground

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood today cautioned construction workers, highway contractors, and others who perform digging activities about the hazards of underground excavation. The reminder follows two separate incidents last week involving excavation workers and high pressure energy pipelines in the State of Texas.

“Excavation damage is a serious safety threat to the general public and to individuals with occupations that involve digging underground,” Secretary LaHood said. “The Department strongly encourages individuals to call 811 before digging. It’s not only the law, it helps save lives.”

Dialing 811, the national three-digit “Call-Before-You Dig” number, is a free service that connects excavators anywhere in the country to One-Call centers to alert utility owners of planned digging exercises. Through its Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), the Department continues to push for the widespread use of 811 to help provide additional protections for underground facilities and excavators.

“Damage to underground pipelines resulting from digging has historically been a leading cause of serious pipeline incidents resulting in fatalities and injuries,” said PHMSA Administrator Cynthia Quartermann. “All stakeholders must recognize that safe practices underground is a shared responsibility. We must all do our part to protect lives and reduce excavation damage nationwide.”

Between 2000 and 2009, excavation damage was the leading cause of all significant pipeline incidents. These excavation damages resulted in 38 fatalities, 158

- continued -

injuries, and \$196 million in property damage. On June 7, a 36-inch diameter natural gas pipeline operated by Enterprise Operating, LLC was struck by local utility crews using heavy equipment during an excavation assignment in Cleburne, Texas. The incident resulted in one death and six injuries. Additionally, on June 8, a 14-inch diameter DCP Midstream natural gas gathering pipeline was struck and ruptured by employees of a construction company attempting to extract kaliche clay near Darrouzette, Texas. The June 8 incident resulted in the deaths of two workers and serious injuries to three others. Investigations into the causes of each incident are being conducted to determine whether the State's One Call Center was notified and the pipelines involved were properly marked.

One of the primary tools for avoiding damages to pipelines and other underground facilities is timely communication between excavators and those who operate or own buried facilities. When contacting One-Call Centers, excavators should be able to properly identify areas of planned digging activities to ensure all utilities are accounted for before work commences. The One-Call Center then contacts utility companies, which can dispatch crews to locate and mark the exact location of their utilities to avoid unintentional contact.

For more information on the Department's efforts to reduce excavation damage to pipelines, visit the PHMSA website at:
<http://primis.phmsa.dot.gov/comm/DamagePrevention.htm>.

For more information on calling 811 before you dig, visit:
<http://www.call811.com>.

-END-